DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 411 338 UD 031 869

AUTHOR	McMillan, James H.
TITLE	Successful Literacy Passport Test Remediation. Strategies for Elementary and Middle School Students: A Research Report.
INSTITUTION	Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium, Richmond, VA.
PUB DATE	1995-10-30
NOTE	45p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Planning; Elementary Education; Elementary School Students; *Elementary School Teachers; Focus Groups; *Literacy; Middle Schools; Qualitative Research; *Remedial Instruction; State Programs; Student Motivation; *Teacher Education; Testing Programs
IDENTIFIERS	Middle School Students; *Student Engagement; Virginia Literacy Passport Test

ABSTRACT

The instructional strategies teachers and other school personnel have used in the successful remediation of students who have failed reading and writing portions of the Virginia Literacy Passport Test (LPT) or the LPT Predictor Test were studied. The intent was to determine if specific approaches seem to work best for different types of students and whether particular materials, teaching strategies, scheduling, or other factors are associated with successful remediation. A qualitative research design was used that relied on focus group interviews of 16 elementary school teachers (2 groups) and 18 middle school teachers (3 groups). Findings suggest that the key to successful remediation is student engagement in learning and applying needed skills. Some general principles were identified that appear to foster student engagement. On a schoolwide level, these include organizational commitment to successful remediation, cohesiveness of effort, and a systematic plan that includes identification of students, diagnosis, and feedback to teachers. On an individual level, teachers need training, commitment, and a sense of shared responsibility to help students succeed. Specific strategies that appear to be helpful include teaming, teaching test-taking skills, practice, small groups, individualized attention, modeling, close supervision, peer instruction, and activities and materials that hold student interest and motivate them to succeed. Four appendixes contain the principal nomination form for focus group participation, the topic outline, and codes for responses. (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 411 338

Successful Literacy Passport Test Remediation Strategies for Elementary and Middle School Students: A Research Report

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

GWEN HIPP
MERC

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • COLONIAL HEIGHTS CITY SCHOOLS • HANOVER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • HENRICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • HOPEWELL CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • POWHATAN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • RICHMOND CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS • VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

UD031869

METROPOLITAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

PO BOX 842020 • RICHMOND VA 23284-2020 • Phone: (804) 828-0478 •
FAX: (804) 828-0479 • E-MAIL: jpisapia@EDUNET.SOE.VCU.EDU

MERC MEMBERSHIP
John Pisapia, Director

CHESTERFIELD COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Thomas R. Fulghum, Superintendent
Chairman, MERC Policy & Planning Council

COLONIAL HEIGHTS CITY SCHOOLS
James L. Ruffa, Superintendent

HANOVER COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Stephen M. Baker, Superintendent

HENRICO COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Mark A. Edwards, Superintendent

HOPEWELL CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
David C. Stuckwisch, Superintendent

POWHATAN COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Margaret S. Mears, Superintendent

RICHMOND CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Lucille M. Brown, Superintendent

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
John S. Oehler, Dean
School of Education

Virginia Commonwealth University and the school divisions of Chesterfield, Colonial Heights, Hanover, Henrico, Hopewell and Richmond established the **Metropolitan Educational Research Consortium** (MERC) on August 29, 1991. The founding members created **MERC** to provide timely information to help resolve educational problems identified by practicing professional educators. **MERC** membership is open to all metropolitan-type school divisions. It currently provides services to 7,000 teachers and 120,000 students. **MERC** has base funding from its membership. Its study teams are composed of University investigators and practitioners from the membership.

MERC is organized to serve the interests of its members by providing tangible material support to enhance the practice of educational leadership and the improvement of teaching and learning in metropolitan educational settings. **MERC's** research and development agenda is built around four goals:

- To improve educational decision-making through joint development of practice-driven research questions, design and dissemination,
- To anticipate important educational issues and provide leadership in school improvement,
- To identify proven strategies for resolving instruction, management, policy and planning issues facing public education, and
- To enhance the dissemination of effective school practices.

In addition to conducting research as described above, **MERC** will conduct technical and issue seminars and publish reports and briefs on a variety of educational issues.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Successful Literacy Passport Test Remediation Strategies for Elementary and Middle School Students: A Research Report

Submitted by:

James H. McMillan
Professor

Virginia Commonwealth University

October 30, 1995

Successful Literacy Passport Test Remediation Strategies for Elementary and Middle School Students: Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine instructional strategies teachers and other school personnel have employed to successfully remediate students who have failed the reading and writing parts of the Virginia Literacy Passport Test (LPT), or the LPT Predictor Test. The intent was to determine if specific approaches seem to work best for different types of students, and if particular materials, teaching strategies, scheduling, and other factors are associated with successful remediation.

Methods

A qualitative research design was employed to gather and analyze information related to successful remediation. Classroom and resource teachers who had experience in remediating students who had failed either the reading or writing parts of the LPT were interviewed in a series of five focus groups. There were two elementary level focus groups (16 participants) and three middle school level focus groups (18 participants).

Conclusions

The findings from this study suggest that the key to successful remediation is student engagement in learning and applying needed skills. There are some general principles and approaches that appear to facilitate student engagement. Several of these are school-wide, including an organizational commitment to successful remediation, cohesiveness of effort, and a systematic plan that includes identification of students, diagnosis, and feedback to teachers.

Individually, teachers need training, commitment, and a sense of shared responsibility to help students succeed. Specific strategies that appear to be helpful include teaming, teaching, testtaking skills, practice, small groups, individualized attention, modeling, close supervision, peer instruction, and activities and materials that hold student interest and motivate them succeed.

Successful Literacy Passport Test Remediation

Strategies for Elementary and Middle School Students:

A Research Report

Table of Contents

Executive Summary i

BACKGROUND 1

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY 1

METHODOLOGY 2

Participants 2

Procedures 4

Data Analysis 4

FINDINGS 5

Elementary 5

Middle 15

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS 27

REFERENCES . . . . .

APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL NOMINATION FORM

APPENDIX B: TOPIC OUTLINE

APPENDIX C: ELEMENTARY CODES

APPENDIX D: MIDDLE CODES

Successful Literacy Passport Test Remediation Strategies for Elementary and Middle School Students: A Research Report

BACKGROUND

In Virginia middle school students must pass all three parts of the Literacy Passport Test (LPT) to be promoted to the ninth grade. Students begin taking the test in the sixth grade, and have several opportunities to pass. As early as fourth grade, students can take the Literacy Passport Predictor Test to ascertain deficiencies that need attention. School divisions are responsible for providing remediation for students who fail one or more parts of the LPT. The test has high stakes in that it represents a significant barrier for some students.

In 1994 MERC initiated a reading and literacy research agenda. In this first phase of this research a survey study was completed that focused on content and instructional approaches in language arts programs which are emphasized by teachers. The present study was designed as the second phase of the research agenda to investigate remediation practices of teachers for the reading and writing parts of the LPT.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to examine institutional instructional strategies teachers and other school personnel have employed to successfully remediate students who have failed the reading and/or writing parts of the Virginia LPT or LPT Predictor Test. The intent was to determine if specific approaches seem to work best for different types of students (e.g., elementary or middle), and if particular materials, teaching strategies, scheduling, and other factors appear to be associated with successful remediation.

Specific research questions included the following:

> What remedial instructional strategies and approaches have been particularly successful in helping students pass the reading and writing portion of the LPT? What is it that seemed to make the difference in helping students?
>
> Are there any strategies or techniques that have not been successful?
>
> How do teachers decide what strategies or approaches should be used with their students?
>
> What elements of the process, procedures, and delivery methods affect remediation?
>
> What mechanisms are in place to ensure accountability?
>
> What is the level of parental involvement?

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was used to investigate successful remediation strategies. Five focus groups were convened in early May, 1995, to provide the information.

Participants

The participants were classroom and resource teachers who had experience in remediating students for the LPT. These individuals were purposively selected to be knowledgeable about successful remediation strategies, and to be from different schools. Initially, a list of potential teachers was provided from Phase I of the MERC Reading and Literacy study. In the survey teachers could volunteer to participate in the remediation study. In an effort to focus on teachers who had been successful with their remediation efforts, MERC elementary and middle school principals were sent a Principal Nomination Form in March, 1995, requesting names of individual classroom teachers, resource teachers, supervisors, or other school personnel who have been, in their opinion,

particularly successful in remediation efforts in your school for students who have failed the reading and/or writing parts of the Literacy Passport Test (LPT) or the LPT Predictor Test (Appendix A). Their opinion was to be based on their personal knowledge of the experience of individuals; on the pass rate of students who retake the LPT; recommendations of a supervisor, counselor, specialist, or other person in your school; or other information.

Participants were selected from the Principal Nomination Forms received by first matching names with those who had volunteered, then selecting those nominated. Selection was done to result in as many different schools being represented as possible.

Sixteen individuals participated in two elementary level focus groups, representing sixteen different schools. Seven individuals were from Chesterfield, two from Henrico, three from Colonial Heights, two from Hanover, and two from Richmond.

Eighteen individuals participated in three middle level focus groups, representing eleven different schools. Three individuals were from Chesterfield, five from Henrico, five from Hanover, two each from Richmond and Hopewell, and one from Colonial Heights.

Procedures

The study group developed a Topic Outline for the focus groups (Appendix B). This provided a guide for conducting the group interviews, though the questions were not necessarily followed in sequence. Each of the groups was moderated by Dr. McMillan, and was held at Virginia Commonwealth University. Each interview was tape recorded, though participants were assured that their responses would be confidential. Several members of the study team attended the groups as observers (at least one study group member at each focus group). During the interview the moderator and observers took notes. Following each

group session the moderator and observers debriefed to record further observations and findings.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by first reviewing moderator and observer notes and discussing major themes, issues, and conclusions. This was done individually by the moderator and in a group setting with members of the study team separately for the elementary and middle groups. In addition, transcripts of the interviews were coded and analyzed. The codes were developed as the transcripts were reviewed, and comments coded as appropriate. The elementary transcripts contained 180 coded comments and 26 codes. The middle level transcripts contained 249 coded comments and 22 codes (See Appendix C for elementary and middle codes). The comments were analyzed by placing similarly coded comments together and then synthesizing the information. Most frequently cited codes were analyzed first to obtain some impression of the importance of different topics and factors. For example, some codes contained as many as 25 comments, while others contained only four or five. These syntheses were illustrated by representative comments (quotes from the participants) and integrated with the earlier findings from the moderator and observer observations.

FINDINGS

The results are presented by summarizing important themes that correspond to coded responses. Findings for elementary and middle level groups are reported separately, followed by an integration that has implications for structuring effective remediation programs.

Elementary

Organizational/Structural Factors

It was evident that successful remediation efforts were characterized by certain school organizational/structural factors. One of the most salient features was the emphasis on a "team" approach to remediation. There were many comments about how **teaming** and **collaboration** were used. Teachers worked together for the students to provide a comprehensive, focused, and consistent approach. Teachers were not left by themselves to remediate - there was a **group commitment** that probably fostered a serious, concerted effort that would be evident to students. Here are some illustrative comments:

> We have a teaching specialist ... she's just a real fabulous person ... what we do is have a meeting every Monday morning...we brought in the writing teacher ... we brought in the librarian.
>
> There has to be a group effort.
>
> Each Friday we brought all the teachers down, they had to read three papers to the group of six ... so each teacher had the opportunity to compare and contrast.
>
> So it led to team teaching and collaborative planning ... we have built in every Friday a planning time that the three of us do plans.
>
> That's one thing that seems to be working because my other partner in the fifth grade, she's into the collaborative teaching with the other teacher and she says it's wonderful, it works beautifully.
>
> A group effort and responsibility for these kids between the classroom teacher, myself ... we have instructional aides that we pull into this.

It was also evident that students will be effectively remediated in a school where resources are provided to give teachers **extra help** in the regular classroom. Clearly students need and benefit from having additional personnel in the classroom. This extra help comes

in various forms, depending on the system or school, such as specialists, Chapter 1 teachers, volunteers, and instructional aides, though it appears that the help needs to be in **significant amounts of time each day** to be effective.

> She comes in and conferences with the children, works with group conferencing, peer conferencing, and that is what has made it work this year.
>
> We did have three people going into the fourth grade. There was a classroom teacher, there was myself, and the reading specialist.
>
> Luckily we do have a group of volunteers that we have trained to work in the writing center ... these people come in and give their time.
>
> They have asked me to stay an hour a day ... rather that be-bopping in and out of their classrooms ... they ask me to stay with them for five or six weeks at a time ... help the children in small groups.

This finding is consistent with the idea that it is generally more effective to **push-in** rather than pull-out, putting extra resources in the regular classroom. Note how enthusiastically these teachers supported push-in:

> I spent 17 years remediating them, pull out, they went back to the classroom, no difference, didn't apply what we taught, there wasn't a reason to apply because their grade wasn't going to go up. Now that I'm helping within the class, suddenly they see a difference in their grade ... they're motivated to be part of the class, and it's so much better.
>
> I was a pull out for 18 years. You could never have told me that **push-in would work** until we did it. It's been a godsend. It's **wonderful** because the carry over, the continuity, the coordination, **everything** is built in and to me it's made the biggest difference in the world.

Another organizational factor that was mentioned several times, with clear agreement among members of the group, was the need for efficient and timely **follow-up of remediated**

students and feedback to teachers. There was a feeling of frustration that a more concerted effort was not being made to inform teachers about the sixth grade scores of their students. This feedback would be very helpful in identifying strategies and approaches that were effective:

> Does anybody here have the hard core data to say these children that I had in fourth or fifth grade ... did they pass it in sixth grade or not?
>
> You invest a lot of interest and energy in some of the children and then you can't even really follow it up easily.

Finally, it seemed that teachers were very appreciative of **workshops** and **in-services** that would help them understand the nature of the tests.

Teacher Responsibility

It seemed clear from the responses that classroom teachers believed that they were primarily responsible for students passing the LPT and for remediating students. In other words, these classroom teachers took on **ownership, commitment,** and **responsibility.** This probably suggests a seriousness of purpose and dedication that is translated as a serious, yet caring, attitude:

> It's really up to the classroom teacher in fifth grade to do that remediation for the writing.
>
> And my hypothesis again is that it's the attitude of the classroom teacher and they handled that.
>
> Well, in this world if you're not dedicated, you better not teach because what can you do in a whole day even with the few hours that you have with the children.
>
> I had to get them interested in something. I mean, I just thought that was my job.

General Approaches To Teaching

One of the most salient findings from these groups was the emphasis on student **attitude, motivation, and interest.** Again and again, comments were made to the effect that students need become engaged in reading and writing. This occurs as teachers use approaches and materials that helps the student make a **meaningful connection** with the topic. The purpose of reading is constructing meaning; the key to motivating a student to pursue, to enjoy, and to become competent in both reading and writing is **meaningfulness**:

> Until they have some type of connection, when it's really important for them to communicate in life, it's like you got to watch for the time when it's right.
>
> We've finally been able to break through that shell and find the time when they were very vulnerable and really wanted a piece to say something, and the aide and I jumped in on those opportunities and what those kids produced was absolutely unreal.
>
> I felt that once you get them hooked on reading, that solves the problem. It really does.
>
> At a teachable moment they write about something that they want to write about.
>
> Why would you ask a kid to write about a dog when he never had a dog. You got to go into their experiences. You need to make it broad based so that every child can pull something from it.
>
> As a teacher, I made it my business to get into that library and find something that they were interested in. If they were interested in plumbing, I found a book on plumbing, I mean, hunting, whatever it was.

Another significant finding concerning general approaches was the need to emphasize writing **processes** and **procedures.** This essentially gives the students a **structure** and **approach** that they can use in different writing tasks. By providing structure and a **formula,** and by breaking down the process into small parts, students can more easily stay focused.

> Some kind of process to aim for as you were saying, like a lead in, and then a paragraph to tell what you're going to be writing about, and then explain ... even though that's kind of a stylized thing, it helps them to anchor on to something ... it helps students to stay focused.
>
> So what I've done is my kids know to follow that structure.
>
> With good skills and mapping and paragraphing and what I did for two of my remedial students is that I draw boxes ... this box is for the introduction, this second is now telling me what's happening.
>
> Children need more than anything else a structure to follow.
>
> Taking the areas of the test for the writing part, like composing and style and breaking them down to single steps and parts that we teach them about rather than looking at the whole area at one time.
>
> They had a checklist they had to go through.
>
> We've given them this formula writing.

For many of the teachers the nature of the structure or process that was taught was consistent with the specific format and nature of the LPT. While they did not teach the test, they certainly advocated **teaching to the test** so that students would be familiar with and practice the skills needed to score well, especially practice with the **close** procedure.

> I go in and teach them, of course, all five domains and I really focus the composing and style and show them how it's possible to get perfect scores on the bottom last three domains and still not pass the test if those first two are not done well ... we start out by taking papers from the SDOE and on the overhead show why those students received the scores that they did.
>
> Told them exactly that it's triple-weighted and double-weighted ... we gave them a format for each type of writing they could possibly do when they took the test.
>
> Yes, I don't say that it's on the test, but it is posted in the classroom as, this is what composing means, this is what style means.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

We do writing every single day for about 15 to 25 minutes.

I think over the years that it has become clearer to me that all of us learn whatever it is that we're try to learn by doing it a lot.

Writing, writing all the time. We have a school post office where they have pen pals and they are just encouraged to write a lot, I mean we just write, write, write all the time ... all through the grade levels.

We give a writing prompt every Tuesday.

From day one the children are reading their own work out loud.

I think it's very, very important for them to have many opportunities to read lots of material.

We still do the close procedures to help them become familiar with the passage, I think if you prepare them for how to hit to the wall, and what they need to do, then when they get to the wall, it's not so frightening. They understand it. They understand what's going to be expected of them.

Cloze procedure, you could have taken sections of the novel, type it into the computer, and have the computer template make you close procedures just like the ones in the DRT.

This extra practice in some cases is substituted for science and social science:

We wrote a letter to the parents to see if they would like for their children to have maybe some extra reading and writing in lieu of science and social studies.

A general approach that we found important was the need to keep materials at the right level and individualize as much as possible. Having a variety of books on many different reading levels related to a topic is the first step in individualizing instruction. Next comes matching the student with a book that he/she can easily read, followed by additional opportunities to successfully read.

They do that, express things so much better if it's, like I said, started at a level that's comfortable with them.

> We're fortunate to have an assortment of levels of books related to the topic ... we have a topic dealt with in many books at many different levels and it helps a great deal with a child who's had or would have had difficulty perhaps ... we can get many children involved.
>
> My inclination is to put them in material that is at their independent level, and amazingly, soon they can take a little higher independent level, and then a little higher independent level, and suddenly, they catch on to liking it, if they read lots of things that they're comfortable reading. It's the best cure that I have discovered in my many years in education.

A related finding is the need to allow students to make as many **choices** of their own as possible, though students need to have experience in writing for purpose and not choice. One effective approach is for the teacher to "advertise" reading materials.

> Allowing them now to choose something that they like to read on their own, it has just really worked wonderfully this year and they look foreword to Friday having that free time to read whenever they like.
>
> They can bring anything they want - books, magazines, whatever - it's their choice.
>
> My children do write better when they get to choose their own topics ... they were not nearly as motivated to write with a prompt ... in most professions you're writing for a purpose, so they need both.

Teachers indicated that most efforts to improve skills for the LPT were emphasized first for the **entire class**, and not initially for individual students. **Whole groups** of students were taught, followed by targeted individualized attention in the fifth grade. This was especially true as a preventative approach through fourth grade, rather than waiting until that grade to target specific students.

> This is for all the class.
>
> It was not targeted for specific students, it was whole groups.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

We would do the whole class instruction for all the areas.

If you're going to be remediating, if you've taught the entire class the vocabulary, that's just one step ahead when it comes time to remediate; they've already been exposed to it with the whole class and then you just kind of extend it.

Finally, teachers indicated that it is helpful to create a **low level** of **student stress**:

All the pressure's gone of being afraid of the vocabulary words or being afraid of the context or being afraid of comprehension questions, that's out of the way and then they can just sit and we can read it and then we can discuss it.

There's no test afterwards, there's no quiz, just to read and they've become so excited.

The right level, which is not any stress.

But sometimes I feel like you put so much pressure on the students that have trouble that you can really stifle the whole thing.

Specific Instructional Strategies and Techniques

There were several specific instructional practices that the teachers emphasized as being effective. The most frequently mentioned was the need for the teacher to **model** reading and writing as much as possible:

So, I think a lot of modeling is really good.

We do a lot of modeling in the classroom.

What I found is that I had to read and read something that they would want to read and I go sit beside the student and they would see me read and see me just get into it so then I would get them excited about it. What made it work is that they saw me reading, I was modeling reading and you have to do that in order for it to work.

We've modeled, but we are not modeling from the heart, we're not passionate about what we are doing.

The group participants also found **peer teaching** to be a very effective technique:

> Letting children explain to each other is a powerful strategy because interestingly enough they seem to be able to explain at the right level.
>
> Let the children tell each other how they got the answer.
>
> I let them sit in groups, and they edit each other's papers and they make the marks.
>
> They would partner up and have to read to one another.
>
> When I do those little groups like three or four students that are listening to each other's papers . . . hearing other students' good writing is one of the best things they can do.
>
> Knowing that they're going to come back the next day and work in a group to create a project, they will go home and they will read it for homework so that they can come back and be knowledgeable because their group mates are much harder on them than their teacher can be.

Other techniques that were mentioned included the use of **thematic units, close supervision, journals, visualization,** making students **accountable** for what they read, and reading more **nonfiction** material.

It was interesting to note what the teachers indicated was generally **ineffective**: using a language book and writing a sentence from a language book (e.g., underlining the noun), round-robin reading, and worksheets and workbook exercises students work on independently. It was also interesting to note that there were very few comments about parental involvement or about targeting specific strengths and weaknesses based on a diagnostic assessment of student skills.

Most of the comments and discussion seemed to focus more on approaches that are, in general, effective, rather than pinpointing remediation strategies for helping individual

students pass the LPT. It seemed as though there could, perhaps should, have been more awareness of and knowledge about the remediation process and emphasis.

Middle

Organizational/Structural Factors

Like the elementary focus groups, middle school participants stressed the importance of particular organizational and structural factors for successful remediation. The most frequently mentioned was the importance of working in **teams**. Within their team, teachers spoke of determining how to do the remediation, of noting what each teacher is doing for a particular strategy, and then sharing strategies. Everyone was able to have the **same expectations**, and **all assumed responsibility** for teaching reading and writing. This results in a **school wide commitment** that students will pass the LPT. There is a **cohesiveness** and **unified effort** that is evident, resulting in a **plan** of some kind for **systematically addressing** remediation.

> All the teachers gave this pep talk to all of our classes about "we're going to do this LPT . . . we're going to help our buddies get across this thing and we're going to be done with this thing."
>
> Students get to feel that it's an effort from the entire school body that's helping them.
>
> And I have to say that our teachers, we have a real united front, keeping in mind that you're bound to have your little spats ... all the teachers are very cohesive and unified in our environments ... I mean, everybody has the same expectations.
>
> Everybody is assuming responsibility for teaching reading and writing. When I went there fourteen years ago, nobody was assuming responsibility for teaching reading and writing, nobody.
>
> We have team meetings two, sometimes three times a month, but with something like the LPT, that's almost daily and hourly ... we have a common planning time.

> I think the best thing we did is we trained all seventeen of our sixth grade teachers and most of our seventh and eighth grade teachers to score the test.
>
> And I think one thing that I have at my school is team players, my team teachers, who I co-teach with ... the strategies on my team have been taught across the board.

An important aspect of the team concept is to have a reading specialist available to be a resource for students and teachers alike:

> Being able to have reading resource people in the school to team teach with them to show them how to implement those because counties are cutting back on their inservice budgets.
>
> That's why it's so important to have the reading specialist there to act as that resource so that they can help not only with the students, but work as training agents with the faculty.

Another organizational factor concerns the identification and selection of students for remediation. It was evident that such strategies vary considerably by building, and that there was no clear consensus about an approach that seemed to be most effective. That is, while it was important to have some kind of systematic effort to identify students, the specific nature of that process could vary. Some students are placed in programs because the failed the LPT in sixth grade, some are served because they scored in the lowest quartile on the ITBS, beginning in sixth grade, some schools utilize the LPT Predictor Test, while others have a committee that reviews student folders. In some schools a Student Educational Plan is developed for each student, though more commonly individualized plans are not used:

> We have their student educational plan which is written in combination, we ask the elementary schools, the feeder schools, to send us their student educational plan which they have to draw up for any child who didn't pass the predictor test.
>
> You have to have a Literacy Development Plan, and that is our Student Educational Plan.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> What we do when we get our students at the beginning of the year, we look over all of their test scores and all of their folders to see what we're getting ... we go by what we see.
>
> After the first month or so, if you've pulled enough work from your students, you know what level your students are on, and basically . . . "these students are at risk."
>
> We only take kids into the program who score between 0-25 on the ITBS.
>
> We generally have several different tests that we pull from and not just one ... we look at all of them.
>
> They (students) don't have any choice if they failed the LPT. They do have some choice if it's bottom quartile.
>
> We've used a student education plan that we develop for each of those students.

Many schools were organized to **pull out** students from either regular English classes or from content area classes, though some thought this was not a good practice:

> We pull them from English.
>
> They're routed into the lab twice a week from their English class.
>
> We don't do pullout in our school ... We don't either. I don't think pullout would be acceptable at all.
>
> We have children who are in a tutorial elective because of their predictor test ... it's pull out in that they are not able to go to two elective classes.
>
> This is the first year, trying something in our school and it's like an elective course for those kids who failed the LPT.

A final important organizational factor that was mentioned quite frequently by teachers was to ensure appropriate **teacher responsibility** and **qualifications**. This suggests that teachers need to assume **personal responsibility** and **commitment** for student success,

and that they need **appropriate training.** Responsibility for students' passing the LPT lies with classroom teachers in **all content areas,** with assistance from reservice teachers. Teachers need to be trained in test format, scoring, and expectations. Teachers need to be interested in and motivated to help students succeed. Regular classroom teachers should not generally be "pulled" to do remediation unless they are trained and interested in doing it. It is important that all teachers receive **supervisory** and **administrative understanding and support.**

> It is especially important to have appropriate training for new teachers.
>
> I take a hit with sixth grade. I take it very personally.
>
> Usually, I think the teachers take it personally.
>
> So many of the teachers who end up teaching this tutorial have no motivation or interest int, don't have a background or training in it, and sometimes are not the strongest teachers, you know.
>
> There needs to be something for seventh and eighth grade teachers who are doing tutoring so that we know exactly what we need to focus on or have a better understanding of how the ratings are going to be done.
>
> I think as a teacher everybody is pretty conscientious about these test scores, I mean, I know, if somebody in my classroom fails, I'm just like "oh, my gosh," I mean, I lose i . I expect 100% of my students to pass that test, and when they don't, I feel like I failed somebody.
>
> I'm going to pick up the telephone and I'm going to find a way to make some inroads because these kids are special.
>
> They should have training sessions for you.
>
> When you bring a new teacher in, they have no idea and it puts you at such a disadvantage.

> I cannot tell you the amount of effort that our teachers put in on getting ready for this test ... we knock ourselves out.

Student Motivation

For middle school students needing remediation, **motivating** them to be **meaningfully engaged in learning** is critical. This factor was mentioned much more than any other. This is often fostered by building on student **interests**, by using **instructional techniques that engage them**, **incentives**, and by helping them **realize the importance of passing the test**:

> And it is high interest for students. I mean, these kids think it is interesting generally.
>
> It's not ability level, it's that they need to be motivated to want to do it.
>
> We came up with incentives about pizza parties ... they felt motivation.
>
> He made it very clear to the children that they had to pass and he told them they would not go on to the ninth grade if they did not pass, that he was not kidding.
>
> The students who had not met success were constantly being bombarded from the other kids ... "let me give you a hand with this" ... "don't forget to go to your class," so they couldn't buy into that "oh, woe me, negative attitude."
>
> What I'd like to do is doing it through the student's interests, not matter what area they need to work on ... they all have some sort of interest, you know, that we can work with.
>
> A lot of them just want to quit.
>
> They need to feel some sort of ownership and pride with what he or she is doing no matter what sort of situation they're working in ... needs to feel that he or she has the ability to make a difference in life.
>
> We have eighth graders who should have passed it in the sixth grade and it isn't until they have a vested interest when they take it in February that they put out.

> I've found much more difficulties with attention, and focusing and motivation that I've found with actual reading skills.

One of the key motivational issues seems to be that the students have a low **self-efficacy** of being able to do well on the test, and until this aspect of **self-esteem** is addressed the students will not want to work so that they can be successful.

> Our kids have experienced so much failure by the time they get to us, I feel like they've kind of thrown in the towel and been like, "why bother?" ... they just become apathetic, they're like, "it doesn't matter."
>
> And they are really scared. Even those kids who have that big attitude, they're scared ... really afraid of failing it again.
>
> The kids have such low self-esteem, the first thing they want to do is act up so that they don't have to do the work.
>
> They come to this class thinking, "I don't have to do any work, you know, I'm not good," the self-esteem is very low, so you can imagine ... you've got to really be strong.

Teaching Strategies

It was clear that the dominant teaching strategy for remediation was to use **small groups** of students and **tutoring**. This was more effective than teaching large groups. Thus, as much **individualized attention** as possible is needed to address both the motivational and academic deficiencies of the students. Having opportunities to work individually with students encouraged the development of a **positive relationship** between the teacher or mentor and **student**, which was important for supporting attitudinal and motivational needs. This has implications for staffing and scheduling. It didn't seem to matter how the individualization was organized, e.g., after school, in class, mentorships. Also, it was more a matter of working closely with students that systematically designing an instructional intervention based on diagnosed student deficiencies. Teachers **need to diagnose for**

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

effective remediation, but this did not tend to be a formalized approach or be in the form of a structured plan.

> We created something that was called an educational clinic that worked extremely well with the kids on a one-on-one type basis.
>
> They love having the small group setting.
>
> We had after school tutoring for them.
>
> There's a lot to be said for that feeling of being comfortable with someone you work with, you know, if you're working on the same issue.
>
> I request practicum students for my collaborative reading so we have three adults in that class which helps a lot.
>
> Many of the students that are helping are students that are working with the tutorial program after school or working in the lab after school.
>
> I'm doing pull outs with small groups of students, anywhere between 5-7 students at a time.
>
> It was a small group ... it was only those who could stay after school when we were doing the after school sessions.
>
> And then we begin working one-on-one.
>
> We have an after school tutoring program for Literacy Passport with a bus that takes them home.
>
> I have a collaborative reading class which makes it a lot easier for me to work on remediation with about eight LD students that come in with the teacher so we have two teachers in the classroom ... we've had more success with peer tutoring ... they were very willing to accept help from their peers.
>
> You've got individualized students who have very different needs.
>
> For me, to remediate, you need to diagnose, and If feel like, I think that a lot of our kids have gone for a long, they've been through a lot of years before anybody has diagnosed what their specific

> problem is. I think it's hard to remediate, I mean, we can try to work strategies, but until you can actually diagnose what it is that the student is in need of, it's kind of hard to remediate them.

It was found that **computer programs** can be very effective, including those emphasizing **HOTS** (Higher Order Thinking Skills). The programs were successful in providing **individualization** in a **meaningful** and **interesting** manner. The programs were well-connected to other learning or directly to the LPT, rather than a "one-shot" experience that is unrelated to what students are learning.

> They like writing their response and responding to the prompter on the computer.

> If you remediate in the old ways that we thought of remediation, most kids are resistant to doing again what they have just done in the classroom. So what we do is we use the computer, which is a great grabber of the children's attention anyway, they all tend to like it, and it's a well-orchestrated program.

Teachers indicated that what is **not working well** is using **worksheets**, having to deal with **too many students at once**, and placing responsibility of remediation on **new teachers** who may have little background, training, or experience in remediation for this specific test.

Teaching Test-taking Skills

Much of the discussion centered upon **test wiseness** and the need for **better preparation in basic skills**. It was found that students meeting with success on the LPT often have access to test-taking strategies and practice tests in their language arts classes. They are often **given mock tests**, scan-tron forms and prompts that are similar to what they will find on the test. In addition, students are advised of the nature of the test, e.g., the DRP starting with easy passages and building to the very difficult. Many teachers also believe that

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

basic skills need to be addressed for both writing and reading, such as sentence structure, vocabulary and grammar.

> I tell the kids exactly how it's laid out from the easiest passage to the hardest passage and then we practice on some really hard passages and the ones we practice with, they can still find those clues.
>
> We do practice tests and talk about the tests.
>
> I just call them practice tests with the kids.
>
> Writing is fine; however, before a student can write they need to learn how to put a sentence together and what I'm saying is that some of my students are not even capable of putting a sentence down on paper correctly.
>
> If you can get them to go back and reread it, putting their answers in those boxes, it's amazing how many of them can figure what's wrong.
>
> We circulate commercial packets of information that the teachers use a week or so . . . so that the sixth graders, at least, are familiar with that format.
>
> They do a mock writing test.
>
> I have them test cases and strategies and then we did practice tests and we did the first test together.
>
> We did do a prompt where everybody had to respond and I got a lot of good writing out of that, too.
>
> One thing I wanted to mention about the prompts, I do that all year and I find that it relaxes my students when we come to testing.
>
> We did vocabulary building and that was one of our big focuses.
>
> I'm finding a lot of the kids just don't know basic English grammar.
>
> Vocabulary development, because it doesn't make any difference how much we teach the cloze procedure, when that child looks at that list of words over here and doesn't have any earthy idea what those words mean, then it's really difficult.

In the case of both reading and writing, this translates into **practice, practice, practice**:

> Why are we having this problem with kids not being able to read because they are in school all day long; with all these textbooks in every class they were reading an average of 11 minutes per day. Most of the time it was like lecture or discussion, all these other things, so I emphasize reading, eyes on the printed matter actually reading as much as possible.
>
> All kinds of things just to get them to write ... it's real important for a kid just to write, write, write.

Much of the test-taking strategies mentioned focused on getting students comfortable with using the **cloze** technique that they need to know how to do on the test:

> We work with the students for several weeks before the test to prepare them for the structure of the test. I believe that many of them failed, and I think that's because of the close procedure itself. They were not familiar with that.
>
> I developed each of the units I was able to teach using the close procedure ... for text that I would teach for ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, etc., and the following year, it was incredible.
>
> That's right, spending the whole time on close ... just before the test.
>
> We got into a lot of close procedure activities which they began to enjoy a lot of and began to pick up on.
>
> In my reading, we also were doing close practice.

Some teachers pointed out that, in fact, too much time is taken with close, to the detriment of **learning** how to read:

> I think too much teaching of close is not good.
>
> I needed to find something that was going to improve those scores because this was ridiculous, you know, spending all this time using close procedure.

> Our question and our problem is these kids are far behind and six weeks of this and preparing them for a short time to pass this close section of the test is not what we are looking for.
>
> Am I mostly remediating to the point that I want these kids, you know, do I want to remediate their total reading problem and truly to help them be better readers or is it to help them pass the test? And the bottom line is, to pass the test.

This may also be true for preparation for the writing test:

> They teach their students how to do that, they prepare them for the LPT test; however, those aren't the only criteria that writing would be assessed on, and so I have a tremendous difficulty with that ... there's more to writing than that.

Parent Involvement

It was found that there is relatively **little parental involvement** in helping students to pass the LPT. Parents are usually notified and often must sign off on remediation efforts, but there is not very much systematic help from parents. Teachers expressed concern and an attitude of resignation toward this, indicating that remediation would be more effective if parents were actively involved.

> Every time we make a change in the Student Education Plan (SEP), we try to meet with the parent, and the parent has to sign the SEP ... we really would like to do something more to involve the parents ... these are parents who often won't even come to the phone.
>
> Just letters trying to let them know what we're doing in classes, what's expected of the student, when the test will be.
>
> You cannot get them to emphasize that tho their children ... some of them are willing to help and some of them are not.
>
> And there's no parenting at all.
>
> The best we can get is a signed paper.
>
> I have called and called and nobody ever answers.

We also need to work more closely with the parents.

They're simply required to sign and be aware that this is going on in this program preparation.

CONCLUSIONS and IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of these focus groups was to explore instructional strategies that teachers and other school personnel have found helpful in successful remediation efforts for passing the LPT. What we found is that there seems to be a few general principles and approaches that have common elements, with much less emphasis on specific strategies or techniques. The study team was somewhat puzzled that strategies they had knowledge of in their divisions were not emphasized in the groups. This could be due in part to the group dynamics, nature of questions, and less than representative nature of the sampling. On the other hand, it may also be true that a difference exists between what division-level and school-level personnel perceive as important. It should also be pointed out that this was an investigation of what is *currently* being done in the schools, not what *should* be done.

There really were no surprises in these findings for the study group. Much of what was reported is essential to sound instruction and learning more generally.

The common elements that were identified through the focus groups included the following:

1. School wide commitment to successful remediation, including high expectations of all personnel, cohesiveness of effort, and a plan that is shared and systematically implemented.

2. Teaming of teachers and shared responsibility of all teachers for remediation.

3. Individual teacher commitment, ownership, and sense of responsibility to do whatever is needed to help students pass.

4. Appropriate teacher qualifications and training to understand LPT, diagnose student weaknesses, and implement remediation. Reading resource teachers are especially helpful with this.

5. A systematic effort to identify students needing remediation and regular feedback to teachers concerning success rates of students.

6. Teaching students test-taking skills, specifically the skills targeted in the LPT, such as close and writing to LPT scoring domains. This includes general strategies for how to approach the tests and using a formula or given structure for arriving at answers.

7. More emphasis on teaching basic skills such as vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammar. Effective use of visualization and visual imagery is helpful.

8. Providing students with extensive practice in doing the skills needed to be successful on the tests.

9. Incorporating close and other techniques into content areas.

10. Structuring experiences and relationships with students to motivate them to work hard to succeed. Student engagement is needed, which is fostered by student interest and making meaningful connections with the topics. Motivation may also be enhanced if students share responsibility for developing the remediation plan.

11. Individualizing instruction as much as possible, using push-in models at the elementary level and tutoring programs in the middle school to incorporate small groups and one-on-one instruction. Pull-out programs should be used cautiously.

12. Use of computer programs, journals, visualization, student choice, incentives, and other techniques that are successful in maintaining student engagement.

13. Use of teacher modeling and close supervision with guided structure, often made possible by extra instructional personnel.

14. Begin remediation efforts as early as possible in the elementary school.

15. Avoiding worksheets, round-robin reading, and too great an emphasis on prompts and close techniques that may take away from helping students improve their reading and writing skills more generally.

From these findings it appears that the key to successful remediation is **meaningful student engagement.** Organizational factors, teacher commitment, building on student interest and motivation, and individualized instruction with close supervision create an environment where students are encouraged and rewarded for serious engagement in learning. It is in this condition that students will be receptive to specific strategies and skills that will enable them to be successful.

Some aspects of this environment are at a "macro" level, influenced significantly by school administrators, such as creating a school wide focus, providing sufficient resources to enable small group and tutorial instruction, providing adequate teacher training, and developing a system for systematic feedback to teachers on the performance of their students. Other factors rely primarily on the willingness and commitment of individual teachers - content area teachers to emphasize literacy skills and language arts teachers to diagnose, establish a plan, establish a positive relationship with the student, find interesting materials for students, and do whatever is needed.

APPENDIX A

PRINCIPAL NOMINATION FORM

Principal Nomination Form
MERC Reading and Literacy Study: Phase II

Directions: Please indicate in the space below the names of individual classroom teachers, resource teachers, supervisors, or other school personnel who have, in your opinion, been *particularly successful* in remediation efforts in your school for students who have failed the reading and/or writing parts of the Literacy Passport Test (LPT) or the LPT Predictor Test. Your opinion can be based on your personal knowledge of the experience of individuals; on the pass rate of students who retake the LPT; recommendations of a supervisor, counselor, specialist, or other person in your school; or other information.

Your nominations will be kept strictly confidential. Some or all of them may be selected to participate in Phase II of the MERC Reading and Literacy study, which focuses on identifying successful strategies for LPT remediation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

Name of person completing this form: _____
Telephone: _____

Name of School: _____

Name of School Division: _____

Please return the form by April 1, to:

Amanda Parks
MERC-Virginia Commonwealth U
Box 842020
Richmond, VA 23284-842020

Thank you for your cooperation in this very important study!

APPENDIX B

TOPIC OUTLINE

Topic Outline
3/16/95

LPT Remediation

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify instructional strategies and practices teachers have found to be effective for successful remediation of students failing the writing and/or reading parts of the LPT and LPT Predictor Test. The interview will focus on both successful and unsuccessful strategies, how teachers decide which strategies to use, the process and procedures that seem to work best, evaluation and accountability, and parental/family involvement. Separate groups are convened for the LPT and the LPT Predictor Test (middle and elementary levels).

Overview of Methodology: The nature of the focus group process will be reviewed, with expectations concerning interaction and discussion clarified.

Introductions: Each member of the group will introduce him/herself, summarizing their experiences and involvement in remediation.

Questions: Questions are organized for recording and general sequence in five major sections. In each section differences between the writing and reading parts of the LPT will be identified.

1. (a) From your personal experiences, what remedial instructional strategies and approaches have been particularly successfully in helping students pass the reading and/or writing portion of the LPT? (or LPT Predictor Test) What is it that seemed to make the difference in helping students?

   probe: e.g., orals, manipulatives, questioning, trade materials, close, HOTS, CAI, test-taking strategies, materials, resources, individualized, small groups.

1. (b) Are there any strategies or techniques that you believe have not been successful?

2. How do you *decide* what strategies or approaches to use with your students?

probes: Do you use a plan? If so, how often? Is the plan flexible?

Are individual characteristics of the students taken into account, such as learning style?

Do you use your own observations? Informal assessments?

Do you do any diagnostic testing?

What about work habits, motivation, and attitudes of the students?

3. What are the important elements of the process and procedures, the delivery methods, that may affect remediation?

   (a) Delivery method - (e.g., pull out, in class, summer, after school, tutor, alternative program, individualized, small group [size of group].

   (b) Length of time/frequency of remediation. How often?

(c) Who is responsible for the plan? Who implements the plan? (is the implementor the one ultimately responsible?) (e.g., case manager, teacher, tutor, content area teacher or specialist?)

(d) What resources are needed and provided? Are resources provided used? What about training and technical assistance? Inservice? What about administrative and principal support?

4. Is there any mechanism to ensure accountability?

- teacher accountability?

- formative evaluation?

- Is there any tracking of students? (between elementary and middle)

5. What is the level of involvement of the family and parents? Is there any counseling involved?

APPENDIX C

ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE CODES

Elementary Codes

1. Practice
2. Right level/individualize
3. Low level of student stress/anxiety
4. Choice
5. Attitude/motivation/interest
6. Read non-fiction
7. Teacher's responsibility/team teaching/"team" effort
8. Model reading
9. Journals
10. Visualization
11. Peer teaching
12. Extra reading/writing in lieu of science/social science
13. Parent involvement
14. Extra help in regular classrooms/push in
15. Student accountability/responsibility
16. Summer programs
17. Emphasize process/procedures
18. HOTS
19. Teach to the test/practice tests
20. Whole groups
21. Thematic units
22. Small groups
23. Close

24. What does not work

25. Feedback to teachers

26. Teacher training/in-service

Middle School Codes

1. Small groups/tutoring
2. Close skills emphasis
3. Explain cues used
4. Test-taking skills/basic skills
5. Pullout
6. Teacher responsibility/qualifications
7. Selection/identification
8. Student interest/motivation
9. "Elective" course
10. Read aloud
11. Student choice
12. "Team" effort for teachers
13. More than just pass the test
14. Summer program
15. Vocabulary
16. Parent involvement
17. Diagnostic
18. Pull in
19. Computers
20. HOTS
21. Specific program or approach
22. Writing prompts